

Great days out

On road, off-road or traffic-free, here's CTC's guide to ten of the best weekend bike rides in Britain. By Sheila Simpson, Max Darkins and Nick Cotton





Left & opposite: Sheila Simpson

GREAT ROAD RIDES

These four routes are scenic audax rides – see www.audax.uk.net to ride them as such. They could also be ridden as long day rides at any time or – over two days – as a tour.

1. Cambrian 200km

A straight out-and-back audax ride offers a challenge that many cyclists cannot resist. The aim is to reach a distant goal using the shortest on-road route possible. If your ride is across wild, sparsely populated hills and is easy to navigate, you will have a potentially classic event. Don't worry about using the same roads twice because the scenery always looks different on the way home.

Look at a map of Wales and the Borders and you will see such a route: a string of B and unclassified roads between Leominster and Machynlleth. This is the Cambrian 200km event if you ride there and back in a single day.

Leominster itself is a fine market town, surrounded by an excellent network of Herefordshire and Shropshire lanes and has been the centre of a CTC Holidays & Tours Easter break for several years. The only towns between Leominster and Machynlleth are Presteigne and Llanidloes, both charming and well placed for refreshments at 13 and 44 miles. The final outward leg is a magnificent climb on the Bryn y Fedwen (1,578 feet) mountain road, and the furthest point, Machynlleth, at 64 miles, is renowned for its

Centre for Alternative Technology.

Distance: 128 miles.

Terrain: Initially flat, becoming rolling, then hilly and finally mountainous, using remote rural roads through some of the best scenery in the UK.

Time: 10-14 hours, allowing for café and pub stops.

Start/Finish: Talbot Hotel, Leominster, Grid Ref SO 496 589.

Maps: OS Travel Map, Road sheet 6, Wales & West Midlands/Cymru, 1:250,000.

Access: By rail to Leominster.

Route guides: Danial Webb, audax@danielwebb.com

Local information: Leominster TIC, tel: 01568 616460, tic-leominster@herefordshire.gov.uk

2. Little Auk 50km

This little Cotswolds circuit, designed for families taking part

"Don't worry about using the same roads twice. The scenery looks different coming home"

in the CTC Birthday Rides from Moreton-in-Marsh, is a quiet, rural ride suitable for all ages. There are a dozen delightful villages and market towns, to provide plenty of interest and opportunity for refreshment en route, and almost as many picturesque stream and river crossings, including Traitor's Ford on the infant River Stour, which can

be slimy but has an alternative, and recommended, walkway alongside.

Moreton-in-Marsh itself is an attractive market town on the lovely River Evenlode and the ride follows this valley for the first 7 miles to Kingham before turning east to the second charming town, Chipping Norton. Great Rollright, with its famous prehistoric stone circle nearby, and Hook Norton, with its brewery, are the next attractions. The ride briefly joins Sustrans National Route 5 and the Macmillan Way across the notorious ford, before turning north to Lower Brailes and returning through a string of pretty villages.

Distance: 32 miles.

Terrain: Rolling lanes with a few short, steep ascents and descents.

Time: 2.5-6 hours depending on age and amount of sightseeing en route.

Start/Finish: During the Birthday Rides, choice of start dates on the 4th, 6th or 8th of August 2008 from the Fire Service College main gate, 1.8km east of Moreton-in-Marsh on the A44. Grid Ref SP 222 323. The car park is close to, and will be signed from, the FSC main gate.

Maps: OS Travel Map, Tour sheet 8, The Cotswolds & Gloucestershire, 1:100,000.

Access: By rail to Moreton-in-Marsh.

Route guides: Excel spreadsheet route obtainable from [stephen.poulton@btinternet.com](mailto:poulton@btinternet.com)

Local information Cotswold District Council Offices. Tel: 01608 650881, tourism@cotswold.gov.uk

3. Norfolk 100km

The UK has few really flat cycling routes but this tour in south Norfolk and north Suffolk, using lanes and quiet B-roads, offers easy riding, pretty beauty spots and historic market towns and villages.

Try not to miss the village sign of Pulham St Mary, home of the early airships. It was the main military base in World War 1 and R34 left from here to do the first double-crossing of the Atlantic in 1919. Approaching the county border, Harleston is a traditional south Norfolk town with attractive Georgian buildings, which grew from an ancient market place to a staging post between London and Norwich.

The ride from here to Halesworth is outstanding, with half a dozen pretty villages and hamlets and loads of sky, whilst Halesworth itself, steeped in the history of brewing, malting and agriculture, is the

quintessential north Suffolk town, where time almost stands still.

The only real climb is just after crossing the River Waveney on the return journey and the only hazard of note is the ford at Shotesham Mill, on the River Tas, just south of Norwich. This is very pretty but slippery – use the footbridge.

Distance: 64 miles.

Terrain: Almost totally flat with a short sharp climb at Dove hill.

Time: 3-10 hours depending on age and inclination.

Start/Finish: Norwich, Colney Lane public car park, Grid Ref TG 189 068.

Maps: OS Landranger 134, Norwich and the Broads, 1:50,000.

Access: By rail to Norwich, leave city on B1108, left opposite Colney church.

Route guides: Keith Harrison, sandk.tandem@btinternet.com

Local information: Norwich TIC. Tel: 01603 727927, tic@visitnorwich.co.uk

4. White Peak 100km

The Peak District National Park can be busy on summer Sundays, so Peak Audax organise a series of events on Wednesdays, though the routes can be ridden at almost any time. The first, the White Peak Grimpeur, uses lanes over Pennine moorland and into a dozen Derbyshire dales. The landscape is a pleasing white, green and blue; white cottages and dry stone walls, green grass, blue sky.

The route skirts Kinder Scout to descend lovely Perry Dale and take an easy dale crossing at Dale Head on the way to Tideswell. Through Litton we descend into Miller's Dale, a real beauty with a sparkling trout stream, but pay-back time arrives and we must ascend the local hillclimb course, the reward being a

view of Monsal Head viaduct.

There is a fast descent to Ashford in the Water before a climb round Bakewell to cross Lathkill Dale (a tricky descent) and ascend to Newhaven. We dip into three more dale heads and then gently ascend Long Dale towards Parsley Hay. Here we cross the High Peak Trail before climbing the Jarnett and peaking at over 1,200 feet just before Taddington. After a fast run down Blackwell Dale we cross upper Miller's Dale and ascend to Peak Dale village and the quarried Doveholes Dale – returning over Eccles Pike!

Distance: 63 miles.

Terrain: Hilly with superb millstone and limestone scenery.

Time: 4-8 hours or more, depending on age and inclination.

Start/Finish: Marple Library car park, Grid Ref SJ 960 888.

Maps: OS Travel Map, Tour sheet 4, Peak District & Derbyshire, 1:100,000.

Access: Marple is on the Manchester/Sheffield railway line.

Route guides: Mike Wigley, mike@PeakAudax.co.uk

Local information: Stockport Tourist Information. Tel: 0161 474 4444, tourist.information@stockport.gov.uk

GREAT OFF-ROAD RIDES

These are off-road tours rather than technical trail-centre rides. The first two are covered in more detail (and with maps) by Max Darkins' Rough Ride Guides – see www.roughrideguide.co.uk.

5. London to Brighton: 'The Great Escape'

This is a lovely ride following riverside tracks and well-surfaced

cycle paths, for a flat, easy-going ride that lets you leave the hubbub of the city and reach the seaside under your own power, passing through some great countryside, and barely touching the roads.

Starting in the centre of London, you follow the River Thames, then River Wey, to Guildford, and pick up the Downs Link to Bramber, where the only real climb of the ride (but it is a big one) takes you to the top of the South Downs. Here you are rewarded with some wonderful views and a great descent to the coast, which just leaves a spin down the promenade, to Brighton Pier and the finish.

Distance: 134km/83 miles, with 890 metres of climbing.

Terrain: Well-surfaced cycle paths and canal paths, over flat terrain, which is all generally easy going.

Time: It makes a nice (easy!) ride when done over two or three days, although experienced riders could do it in one day.

Start: London Eye TQ 306/799

Finish: Brighton pier TQ 313/038

Maps: OS Landranger maps 176, 186, 187, and 198.

Access: There are train stations at the start (London), middle (Guildford) and end (Brighton) of the ride. You can take your bicycle on parts of the tube e.g. Circle & District lines outside of rush hour.

Local information: London: www.visitlondon.com. Guildford tourist information, tel: 01483 444333.

Brighton tourist information, tel: 0906 7112255 (50p per min).

6. South West Coast 2 Coast

This is a lovely ride taking you from the north Devon coast to the south Devon coast, along easy, off-road, cycle tracks, such as The Tarka Trail,

By the riverside in Guildford, en route from London to Brighton off-road
Photo by Max Darkins





Left and overleaf: Nick Cotton

Granite Way, and the Plym Valley Trail, for a non-technical, beautiful, picturesque ride, with various attractions along the way.

Starting from the small village of Ilfracombe, on the north Devon coast, you head south, along the coastline. Then you join the Tarka Trail and head inland to Okehampton.

From here you join the West Devon Way, along the edge of the imposing mound of Dartmoor, then join the Plym Valley Trail, finishing in the centre of Plymouth at The Hoe/lighthouse.

Distance: 160km/99 miles, with 2,900 metres of climbing. Or you can pick and choose section(s) to ride.

Terrain: There are some big hills along the way, as well as some long flat sections, and the route mainly follows well-surfaced, traffic-free, cycle paths, with a few (optional) sections along more challenging off-road trails.

Time: It can be done in two days quite easily, but it's easier still over three or even four.

Start: Ilfracombe SS526/478

Finish: Plymouth SX477/538

Maps: OS Landranger maps 180, 191, and 201.

Access: Train stations at Barnstaple (near start), Okehampton (middle), and Plymouth (end).

Local information: Barnstaple tourist information, tel: 01271 375000. Okehampton, tel: 01837 53020. Plymouth, tel: 01752 264849.

7. Fife Coastal Path

This is a fantastic ride along the coast from Edinburgh to Dundee, using some great singletrack

trails, with beautiful scenery and attractions along the way, such as the Chainwalk at Elie, St Monans saltwater swimming pool, many lighthouses, and amazing rock formations such as Buddo Rock.

Starting from Inverkeithing, just over the Forth bridge from Edinburgh, the Fife Coastal Path follows the coastline, past Kirkcaldy, and St Andrews, all the way to Dundee.

Distance: 120km/75 miles, with 1,890 metres of climbing in total, although you could start at Leven and finish at Leuchars (both with train stations), which is 59km/37 miles with 900 metres of climbing.

Terrain: The first section to Leven uses mostly roads and paths, then it becomes off-road, with some sumptuous sections of singletrack

"You leave the hubbub of the city and reach the seaside, barely touching the roads"

along the rugged coastline. The trail gets rougher the further you venture on until you reach St Andrews where you join the easy going Sustrans cycle path (no.1), northwards, along the coast, to the Tay Bridge and Dundee.

Time: Depending on your fitness and which section of the ride you choose to do, it should take one or two days to complete.

Start: Inverkeithing train station NT131/833

Finish: Dundee train station NO406/305

Maps: OS Landranger maps 59 and 65.

Access: There is a train station at the

The Camel Trail is perfect for families and new cyclists. It's short, flat, and is easy to do in sections

start (Inverkeithing) and at the end (Dundee) as well as on the route in Kirkcaldy, Leven, and Leuchars.

Local information: Edinburgh tourist information, tel: 0845 225 5121

GREAT FAMILY RIDES

These rides and hundreds of other similar rides are described in *Traffic-Free Cycle Trails* (£12.99) by Nick Cotton, available from www.sustrans.org.uk (tel: 0845 1130065).

8. The Camel Trail

The most popular recreational ride in the country, visited by over 300,000 people a year, the Camel Trail runs from Poley's Bridge and the wooded countryside of the upper Camel Valley down past Bodmin to Wadebridge and alongside the picturesque Camel Estuary as far as Padstow. There are cycle hire centres in Padstow, Wadebridge and Bodmin with a huge variety of bikes to cater for every combination imaginable, many of which you will see on your way along the ride!

The Camel Estuary is a birdwatchers' paradise. There are cycle hire centres of creeks, sandbanks and rocky shores. Wintering wildfowl include goldeneye, long tailed duck and wigeon. Divers, grebe and many waders can also be seen.

Distance: From 12 to 34 miles for the round trip. Padstow to Wadebridge: 6 miles. Wadebridge to Bodmin: 5 miles. Bodmin to Poley's Bridge: 6 miles

Terrain: A railway path alongside the estuary of the River Camel climbing gently as it heads inland into the woodland around Poley's Bridge.

Time: Calculate 6-7mph or about an hour for each of the three sections between Padstow and Poley's Bridge.

Start/finish: Padstow (Grid Reference SW 922749), Wadebridge, Bodmin or Poley's Bridge (Grid Reference SX 083741).

Maps: OS Landranger 200

Access: Bodmin is the nearest railway station.

Local information: Padstow, tel: 01841 533449. Wadebridge, tel: 01208 813725. Bodmin, tel: 01208 76616. Also try www.visitcornwall.com/site/activities/cycling.

9. The Lune Cycleways

The Lune Cycleways are two railway trails, linked via a short road section alongside the river in the historic

town of Lancaster, running south from Caton and following the stately River Lune from near the wide bend in the river known as the Crook o' Lune down to Glasson, with its marina, docks, pubs, cafes and wide views out over the estuary.

The northern path follows the course of the old Lancaster to Wennington railway and passes beneath the remarkable Lune Aqueduct carrying the Lancaster Canal. As an extra option, a steep flight of steps takes you up to the canal, where the improved towpath can be followed for seven miles north to Carnforth or for three miles south through Lancaster to Aldcliffe. **Distance:** 11 miles one way, 22 miles round trip.

Terrain: Wide, flat traffic-free trails alongside the River Lune and its estuary with a short section on road on NCN Route 6 to the south of the Millennium Bridge in Lancaster linking the two trails.

Time: Allow 3-4 hours for the return trip plus time for refreshments.

Start: choice of: 1, Bull Beck car park on the A683 (Grid Reference SD 542649) about 5 miles northeast of Lancaster; 2, Lancaster city centre, on the southern side of the new Millennium Bridge; or 3, Glasson car park at the southern end of the bike path (Grid Reference SD 448560).

Maps: OS Landrangers 97 & 102.

Access: nearest station is Lancaster.

Local information: Lancaster tic, tel: 01524 32878. For information about cycling in Lancashire including downloadable leaflets visit www.lancashire.gov.uk and enter 'Cycling' in the website's search engine.

10. Speyside Way, east of Inverness

The Speyside Way follows the River Spey, famous for its fishing and whisky distilleries, from Aviemore to the coast at Spey Bay. Although it is primarily a long distance walking route, there is a long rideable middle section for family cyclists largely on the course of an old railway line between Ballindalloch (Cragganmore) and Craigellachie with a spur that bears away from the Spey alongside the River Fiddich to Dufftown.

Set in spectacular scenery, the trail passes close to the famous distilleries of Tamdhu and Knockando. The southern end of the Speyside Way, from Aviemore to Boat of Garten, also offers an easy traffic-free ride and is used by National Cycle Network Route 7.

Distance: Up to 16 miles one way, 32 miles round trip.

Terrain: Riverside and railway path.

Time: 2 hours each way.

Starting points: choice of: 1, Cragganmore, at the end of the B9137, off the A95 between Granttown and Aberlour (Grid Reference NJ 167367); 2, Craigellachie, at the junction of the A95 and A941, southeast of Elgin (NJ 292453); or 3, The trail car park about 1 mile north of Dufftown on the A941 (NJ 321417).

Maps: OS Landranger 28

Access: Elgin or Keith are the nearest stations.

Local information: Elgin tic, tel: 01343 542666.

Useful publications: The Footprint Speyside Way Map (£4.95) shows the whole 66-mile walking route from Aviemore to Buckie. For this map call the Ranger Service (tel: 01340 881266) or visit the website www.speysideway.org.

The Lune Cycleways are two railway trails near Lancaster linked by a short road section



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